

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 003603

SIPDIS

NEA FOR DAS CARPENTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [KWMN](#) [YM](#) [DEMOCRATIC REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: MEPI IN ACTION: YEMENI WOMEN PUT CAMPAIGN SKILLS
TO GOOD USE

REF: A. SANAA 3572

[B](#). SANAA 3558

[1](#)1. Summary: During a December 26 meeting with female representatives from Yemen's major political parties, General People's Congress (GPC) member Fatima Khatari shared the secrets to her recent successful campaign for the party's General Committee. Khatari explained to the group, who meet regularly through a Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) program, how she and her campaign manager/sister Khadija utilized campaign skills taught by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to lobby party members for support and secure a coveted seat on the party's highest committee. The Khatari sisters expressed their appreciation for USG support, saying success would have been impossible without the campaign training provided by NDI. End Summary.

Women's Network: Strength in Numbers

[1](#)2. With the help of a \$695,000 MEPI grant, NDI is working with representatives from Yemen's four largest political parties to increase women's political participation. As part of that effort, NDI established the Women's Network, in which representatives from the ruling GPC, along with opposition parties Islah, Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) and the Nasserite Unionist Party, meet regularly to discuss ways to strengthen the role of women within parties and advance women's issues nationally as a coalition. Some of the Network's activities include developing a lobbying strategy to encourage party leadership to adopt a quota for female candidates in the 2006 local council elections and discussing ways to increase female registration and turn-out in targeted districts. To support the activities the Network agrees on, NDI provides training on conflict resolution, negotiation, strategic planning, and campaign tactics.

On the Campaign Trail: A Winning Strategy

[1](#)3. During a December 26 Network meeting, the Khatari sisters shared with the group how they successfully employed the campaign tactics taught by NDI (along with some of their own special adaptations) to win Fatima a seat on the GPC's highest committee, the General Committee. At the seventh GPC party conference held December 15-18 (ref A), party members voted to fill 25 open seats on the 38-person committee. The party leadership reserved four of the seats for female candidates, following through on a previous commitment to implement a 15 percent quota for female representation (ref B). Without the quota, the sisters said neither one of them stood any chance against a male candidate. "With the quota, we decided one of us must run," Fatima told the group.

[1](#)4. They decided to canvass party members to determine which sister already had more name recognition. Both sisters are active GPC members. Fatima works in the Women's Affairs and Local Council divisions for the national party. Khadija is Activities Director for the GPC's Sanaa branch. After canvassing, they decided that Fatima would be the candidate and Khadija would be the campaign manager.

[1](#)5. "I really benefited from the (NDI) workshop on leading a campaign," explained Khadija, who developed the campaign strategy. First, Khadija created a brightly colored flyer with a "short and clear message" to distribute to voters. She also worked with Fatima to practice responses on why she would be a good committee member.

[1](#)6. With a platform and campaign literature in hand, the sisters split duties on lobbying party members. The sisters believed the best way to gain support was to focus on influential and well-respected party members whose endorsement would in turn generate votes from the rank-and-file. Fatima focused on getting votes from female party members, starting with the heads of the women's committees in all of the governorates and district party organizations.

17. Khadija took on the harder task of convincing men to support Fatima. Like her sister, she started with the most prominent and well-respected party members. Khadija also convinced Fatima's husband to call voters from his home governorate of Haja, urging them to support his wife. During the actual conference, she made sure every voting member received one of the brightly colored flyers, including the most powerful party member of all, President Saleh. Khadija proudly explained to the group that when she was called to cast her own vote for the General Committee, she confidently placed a "Vote Fatima" flyer directly into the hands of Saleh, who was manning the ballot box. Her tenacity also caught the eye of PM Abdul Kader Ba-jammal who called her "the Fighter" after she was the only woman to observe every second of the voting and counting of ballots, which lasted until the next morning. (Note: Ba-jammal became the new GPC Secretary General during the conference by presidential fiat, thus sparing him the trouble of campaigning like the Khatari sisters).

18. In the end, the Fighter's strategy paid off and Fatima won a seat on the General Committee. "Thank you for the workshops," Fatima said to the NDI coordinators present, "we really achieved something."

Comment

19. Although Yemen is the poorest and least developed country in the region, women's political participation is significantly higher than neighboring oil-rich states. Yemen was the first country on the Arabian Peninsula to enfranchise women and allow them to run for all national and local offices. Women have been elected in every election since unification in 1990, albeit in very small numbers. The ROYG has also showed a stronger commitment to integrating women into the political system, including supporting the 15 percent quota for female representation in the 2006 local elections and creating a special women's representative on the national election commission.

110. Despite being a regional leader on women's rights, the Yemeni political system remains dominated by a handful of male government officials and tribal leaders. Even most men, especially those lacking familial connections to powerful politicians, find it difficult to break into the closed system. While the rank-and-file GPC members hold little sway in overall party policy and government administration, the Khatari sisters' easy grasp of the basics of democratic campaigning bodes well for the future of women in Yemen. With the help of MEPI funding, women are steadily gaining the skills necessary to begin slowly chipping away at the male-dominated political structure.
Krajeski